



# SHIFTING SANDS



## Spiritual note

### In a word...

If there is one word for an issue that has stormed into our awareness over the past years, it is this: abuse.

Abuse is not a new problem, to be sure; wherever and whenever throughout history there has been individual or institutional power, the underside of human nature has found ways to exploit it through the oppression of people. (Lord Acton, the 19<sup>th</sup> century English Catholic historian who authored the famous phrase about “all power corrupt(ing)” thought it was almost inevitable.) In recent years, it seems that a huge stone has been turned over and the light it has let in has shown us, sometimes for the first time, the terrible, even unspeakable, stuff that can flourish in darkness.

I don't mention this as a preface to rehashing all the scandals that have filled –and continue to fill– the news, but to reflect on how our values as members of Alhambra and Porto Charities stand in contrast, and should be an antidote, to abuse in all forms. The same, of course, can be said for any one or any group called Christian; love, after all, is our moral root, and love is diametrically opposed to any hint of abusiveness. But I think the Alhambra/Porto brand of that love shows this even more clearly.

Call it respect. Respect is an aspect of love that goes beyond what I call pay-back love – because God

loves us, we must love one another. Respect gets down to the individuality of love, is based on the equality we have with one another because we are children of God. It is not condescending or patronizing, and it is not subservient. It goes beyond the political equality proclaimed –if not always practiced– in governmental circles and reaches down into our union for now and eternity with our Maker. It places the value of an individual not in what seems good for me or even for society but in the inner and permanent qualities of the individual, in that mysterious identity we call soul.

Respect recognizes mutuality. Our association with the intellectually challenged is itself a school for respect because sooner or later we have to acknowledge that we receive as much –and usually more– than we give. I still remember how this came to me as a wonderful insight in my first association with God's Special People, back in the early 1960s at Lynchburg Training School, not far from the seminary where I was teaching.

Our Alhambra/Porto outreach should school us in the one antidote to abuse in all forms and in all walks of life: a love that flowers in a deep and mutual respect for all God's children.

—Fr. Edwin Dill